

Before It All

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Summary: This is part 1 in my Black Mesa saga, the fourth of which is my other story, The Final Showdown. This takes place in Black Mesa, before the infamous experiment. Please read and review. Chapter 3 is up!

1. Prologue

****This is my second attempt at a Half Life story. I will likely finish my first one, but I like this concept better, personally. Tell me what you think!****

General Odessa Cubbage sat at his desk at the Pentagon, deep in thought. He snapped back into reality, hearing someone clear their throat.

"What the hell are you doing here?" Odessa demanded wearily, seeing the suited man standing before him, holding that damn briefcase, "I told you never to show your face in my office again!"

"Now, nowâ€|General Cubbageâ€|remember yourâ€|mannersâ€|" The man said, straightening his tie. He had entered Odessa's office almost six months before, somehow slipping past security. He had called himself a spook working for the CIA, and gone off on about his important mission. He would not tell Odessa what this mission was, so of course he had declined. Since then, the man had gotten in eight more times, somehow avoiding security every time. Odessa had even gone so far as to post several guards at his door, but somehow the man always got in. Odessa had fired the guards, and then simply stopped caring, accepting the man's entrances as unavoidable.

"I'm not going to accept your offer," Odessa said, lighting up a cigar.

"Be reasonableâ€|General Cubbageâ€|" The spook said, his voice raspy yet smooth, "It will save yourâ€|lifeâ€|in comingâ€|eventsâ€|"

"Oh?" Odessa asked, not having heard this part before.

"When my mission is carried out there will be much collateral damage." He said, "But with your assistance this can be lessened as well as keeping you from harm."

"What the hell is this mission you keep talking about?" Odessa barked.

"Are you familiar with the Black Mesa research facility General Cubbage?" He asked.

"Of course I am. I authorized its production!"

"My mission involves its well, let's just say we won't be needing it anymore."

"And what is that supposed to mean?"

"I mean the facility is to be destroyed." The 'G-man' purred, "And you are going to help."

"I will not help you murder thousands!"

"Oh General Cubbage it is not murder it is evolution."

2. Hazard Course

Gordon Freeman lay in bed, half-asleep. His alarm clock went off, and he reached over to press the snooze button. Finally, he rolled over, looking at the clock. It read 5:23 am.

He rolled over again, sitting over the edge of the bed and rubbing his face in his hands. He stumbled across the dorm, ending up in the kitchen. He switched his stove on, and set a pan on the burner, followed by three slabs of bacon and an egg.

While they sizzled in the pan, Gordon stumbled to the refrigerator, opening it. Withdrawing a carton of orange juice, he walked to a cabinet, removing a glass.

Ten minutes later, he had eaten his breakfast, and was in the shower. He rubbed shampoo through his hair, occasionally glancing at the clock on the opposite wall.

Gordon exited the bathroom, quickly dressing in a blue suit and tie. He jogged to the door, throwing on a white lab coat as he went. Jogging down the dormitory hallways, he passed several closed doors. He opened the door to the stairwell, and descended down it.

After running down four flights of stairs, he pushed open another door, leading to the outside. The sun, as always, beamed down on his face and chest. He grimaced, all this sun was unpleasant at times, but he had a very nice tan, something he could never have gotten back at home. He saw the tram settling to a stop, and rushed forward, yelling for the two occupants inside to hold the door.

When Gordon saw who was inside, he almost stopped. Dr. Colette Green

sat in the seat closest to the door, her mentor and boss, Dr. Richard Keller, across from her. As per usual, Keller was berating her with everything he could think of. As Gordon stepped inside, he smiled politely to Colette, and promptly took a seat at the other end of the tram.

"Good morning," The voice of the tram's PA system began. It was actually the recorded voice of Colette's partner, Dr. Gina Cross. Gordon tried to pay attention to that, rather than Dr. Keller's ranting. He sat back, closing his eyes with a sigh.

Barney Calhoun lay in a bed, tangled in the sheets and completely naked. His girlfriend, Laura, lay next to him. Barney's alarm clock went off, a blaring alarm filling the room with noise. Barney opened one eye lazily, reaching up and slapping the clock. It flew across the room.

With a groan, Barney clambered to his feet, and stumbled across the bedroom. Still naked, he opened the bedroom door, and walked out into the hall. Stepping down the stairs, he walked into the kitchen. From the fridge, he pulled a beer bottle out, and took a deep swig. After a moment, he put it back. He stumbled off to the shower.

Thirty minutes later, he was stumbling with his red uniform. He pulled the shirt on, and buttoned it up. He jogged up the stairs, and entered the bedroom. He lightly kissed a still-sleeping Laura, and went out, pausing only to grab his car keys.

He stepped out of his house, entering the hot New Mexico sun. He took it in for a moment, before walking to his truck. He got in, and felt the air conditioner spray cold air on his face. He let it blow for a moment, and put the truck in drive.

After a forty-minute drive through the desert, Barney pulled up to the gate to the Black Mesa facility. The guard nodded hello to him, and opened it. Barney nodded back, entering. He pulled into the shaded carport. He got out, just in time for the tram to pull in. Running across the lot, he got on just in time.

As the doors closed, Barney saw nobody coming. He knew he would take this ride alone. That was for the better, he supposed. There were only about eight people in the entire facility that he actually liked. All the scientists were stuffy, and uptight, and most of the security guards took their jobs far too seriously.

The voice of Gina Cross came up, announcing the current temperatures for the surface and underground Black Mesa facilities. She drawled on, going over the safety procedures that Barney had heard over a thousand times before.

"Yeah, yeah, keep your hands inside the tram," He mimicked, settling into his seat. Several minutes later, the tram slowed to a stop. A security guard, Stanley, Barney thought, walked to the door and opened it.

"Morning Calhoun," Stanley said, as Barney stepped out of the tram. He nodded, and Stanley led him to the door, unlocking it. Barney walked inside, entering the Security office.

"Hey there Calhoun," The officer behind the desk said, "Nice of you

to join us."

"I'm here, aren't I?" Barney mumbled, walking past the desk.

"You want your assignment sheet Calhoun?" The officer called after him. Barney waved him away, announcing with sarcasm that he'd get his gun first.

Walking to the locker room, Barney saw the first friendly face of the day, belonging to Doctor Isaac Kleiner. Kleiner hurried towards him, scribbling something onto a clipboard.

"Mornin' Doctor Kleiner," Barney said, nodding his head. Kleiner looked up, surprised to see him there.

"Ohâ€¦hello there Barney. What are you doing in this sector?" The Doctor asked. Barney chuckled.

"Well Doc, I kinda work here," He said, obviously taking Kleiner aback. The doctor composed himself quickly,

"Oh yes, that's laterâ€¦continue on, Barney," Kleiner said, continuing on. Barney, confused, decided to forget the conversation and keep walking. He stepped into the locker room, stopping at his locker. Opening it, he removed his vest and helmet, putting them on quickly. He grabbed his baton with a sigh.

Gordon stepped off of the tram, walking to the security checkpoint. The guard let him in with a polite nod. Gordon returned it, and stepped into the main office of Black Mesa. An officer in the Blue Shift Security Force sat at the desk, typing into a computer. Gordon walked to the desk.

"Good morning, Doctor Freeman," Officer Ellis said cheerfully.

"Good Morning, Ellis," Gordon returned, "What's on the list for today?"

Ellis typed into the computer for a moment, before glancing back at Gordon. "Doctor Kleiner wants you in his office first thing. He says you'll be busy till noon. At one, you've got the monthly budget meeting."

"That it?" Gordon asked, groaning inwardly about the day's events.

"Yep. Sorry man," Ellis replied, with a reassuring smile. Gordon returned it, and headed off toward Doctor Kleiner's office. He walked down the hallways, passing Doctor Simmons. With a nod of hello, he entered his mentor's office.

"Hello there, Gordon!" Kleiner said, getting up out of his chair and ushering his friend inside. In front of colleagues, Gordon and Kleiner had a very professional relationship, referring to each other by their titles and last names. But, behind closed doors, the two were very good friends, and on a first name basis.

"Hi, Isaac. Officer Ellis said you wanted to see me?"

"Ah yes. You know of Gina's work with the new Hazardous Environment

Suit? Well, she believes it to be finished, and it is to be tested today. However, she asked that you specifically be the one to test it. I believe she's got her eye on you, Gordon," At this Gordon chuckled, but Kleiner continued, "You and I are due in the Black Mesa Hazard Course, about four minutes ago. We should hurry."

Kleiner led Gordon out of his office, hurrying down the hallways. Gordon passed the mess hall, and looked inside, gazing longingly at the coffee machine. His dorm was out.

Gordon stood at the beginning of the Black Mesa Hazard Course, flexing the gloves of the HEV Suit. It fit quite nicely, apparently having been adjusted to his size. Gina had not only built the suit, but she had built him a suit. He grinned, stepping into the course. Doctor Kleiner's voice came over the intercom.

"Hello Doctor Freeman, this is Doctor Kleiner. With me, are Doctors Vance, Rosenberg, and Walters, as well as Security Officer Otis Manning. Are you ready to proceed?" Gordon said yes, and Kleiner directed him into the Hazard Course.

"All right Doctor Freeman, first we will practice movement in your suit. Please jog through this next tunnel," Gordon did, and wound up in a new room. A series of tubes stretched across lengths of the room, at various heights above ground.

"Doctor Freeman, please jump through the first tube, crawl through the second, and run through the third. Good," He said, as Gordon did. He exited the room, to find himself in a very long corridor.

"Now, I understand you are in excellent physical condition? This hallway stretches for one half of a mile. I want you to sprint it." Kleiner said.

"Oh come on, Doctor-" Gordon began, but Kleiner cut him off.

"Now, now, Doctor Freeman. I know you can do this. Go ahead."

Gordon sighed, and set off, running as hard as he could down the corridor. The suit fit wonderfully, fitting his every curve, moving with him. Soon however, he began to run out of air. His legs began to burn. The pleasant voice of Gina Cross came out of a small speaker.

"Administering pain reliever. Pumping air." As soon as she said this, Gordon felt his legs begin to feel normal again. Air pumped into his lungs, filling them again. Gordon managed to run the last of the hallway.

"Thank you Doctor Freeman. Now, step into the next room please."

Gordon did, and saw a vat of bubbling green fluid below him.

"All right, this is where the course becomes hard. Doctor Freeman, I want you to step over to the suit charger, charge it, and then submerge yourself in the vat."

"Hell no!" Gordon cried after several seconds, stepping back from the tank.

"Doctor Freeman-" Kleiner interjected, but Gordon cut him off.

"Look Doctor Kleiner, I'm always willing to help out, but I'm not putting myself intoâ€|that!"

"Gordon, I want you to listen to me," Kleiner said, his voice softening, "In all the years we've known each other, I have never put you in any position you were not comfortable with. I promise you, you will not be harmed. The suit will protect you. Please Gordon, do this for science."

Gordon hesitated, Kleiner's words rushing through his head. The man had a point; Gordon could not see him putting him into any harm's way. After several minutes, Gordon stepped forward.

"Good!" Kleiner exclaimed, "Now, please step over to the suit charger, and place your hand on the pad."

Gordon did so, lifting his palm and placing it on the indicated pad. He felt a tingling sensation, and heard Gina say 'Enabling Heads-Up-Display'. An instant later, two numbers flared up on the lower left corner of his vision, one above the other. The top number was fast filling. The bottom was 100.

"You will notice two numbers now. Those are your HEV and HEV charge indicators. When the suit is charged, you are fully impervious to harm. It activates an energy field around the suit, covering every part of your body, including your head. The Mark IV suits do not have this, relying more on the helmet to protect against the elements. This is a major improvement " As he spoke, the top number settled at 100. Gordon felt a gentle push on his hand, removing it from the pad. The charger went dark.

"Once the charger goes dark like that, it is empty. You can no longer use it until the battery, ironically enough, recharges. However, this takes several hours. The charge count in your display will diminish to zero before the suit itself can take damage. This is represented by the bottom number you can see. Once both numbers reach zero, you yourself are vulnerable. Now, Gordon, please submerge yourself in the vat."

Gordon stepped forward tentatively, slowly approaching the vat. The green fluid bubbled menacingly. As he reached the edge, he dipped a toe into it. Immediately, his foot began sweating. He whipped his foot out, crying out at the intense heat.

"Lowering suit temperature," Gina's voice said, and immediately his foot returned to normal temperature. He cursed, loudly, before giving a look at the observation window. Before he met anyone's eyes, he closed his own, and stepped into the vat.

He felt like he was on fire, but only for a moment. Gina announced that she was lowering the temperature, and Gordon felt like he was back on the surface. He would not open his eyes, yet he could see the two status numbers, noting the top rapidly diminishing. When it reached 40, he realized he had to get out of there.

From the observation window, Doctor Isaac Kleiner watched the vat anxiously. He had told Gordon that he was in no danger, but if that

suit power became depleted—he didn't want to think what would happen to his friend if that happened. He felt a reassuring hand on his shoulder, and glanced at it. The dark skin identified it as Eli Vance's, although Kleiner knew that already. There were only two people in the entire facility that came as close to being friends with Gordon as he had; Eli, and a security guard, named Barney Calhoun.

Of course, almost everybody liked Gordon, it was hard not to. He was polite, kind, and damned good at his job. He was also quiet, and rather shy. Gordon was a bit on the nerdy side as well, which just about every scientist at Black Mesa was, or had been. Many, Kleiner and Eli included, had hated primary school, being the main target of dozens of bullies throughout the years. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, Gordon had adamantly disputed being subject to the same treatment. When asked why, he would quickly change the subject.

It had almost been a minute since Gordon went under, and Kleiner began to go from anxious to genuinely worried. He felt Eli squeeze his shoulder reassuringly, and knew that the other man was worried as well. Suddenly, and to everyone's relief, Gordon broke the surface of the vat, and hurriedly climbed to the opposite catwalk. He sat back on the metal grating, panting. Kleiner let out a breath he did not realize he had been holding. Eli, laughing with relief, patted him on the shoulder. Rosenberg turned to Otis, and nodded.

"Very good!" Kleiner almost cheered through the radio. Gordon slowly stood, a hint of a relieved smile playing at his lips. His suit charge had stopped at 8. Silently cursing himself for panicking, he swore never to do it again, ever. It had almost gotten him killed just now, and he planned on living for at least fifty more years. At Kleiner's urging, he walked into the next room.

"OK Gordon, this will be the last test. Do you see the HEV charger on the left wall?" Without further instruction, Gordon placed his hand on the pad, and felt the same tingle. A moment later, he watched the number cycle back up to 100. This time, however, the charger didn't go dark.

Gordon jerked his head to the side, hearing a door open. Otis Manning walked out, his hands on his belt.

"Otis—what are you doing?" He asked.

"Your suit will keep you safe, Doctor Freeman. I promise," The security guard replied. Before Gordon could question him, his pistol was drawn.

"Whoa!" Gordon screamed, standing back and throwing his hands up in the air.

"Sorry, Doctor Freeman," Otis said. His finger squeezed the trigger, blasting a bullet out of the chamber. It zipped across the tunnel, impacting on Gordon's chest. He flew back, falling to the ground. The number had diminished to 75.

"What the hell!" Gordon demanded, getting to his feet. Otis had holstered his pistol.

"I'm truly sorry, Doctor Freeman," Doctor Rosenberg's voice said,

"But it had to be done. The suit had to be tested for anyone dealing with Anomalous Materials as well as our security personnel. You may exit the Hazard Course now, Officer Manning will show you the way."

Half an hour later, Gordon was out of the suit. He stood in Doctor Kleiner's office, waiting for the scientist to return. While he waited, he walked over to Kleiner's espresso machine, pouring himself a cup. He drained the cup, and set it down, as Kleiner entered the office.

"I'm am so sorry for that Gordon, I truly am. Had I known all that the course entailed, I would never have let you go through with it." He stammered, obviously feeling very guilty.

"Don't worry, I'm not mad. I know that it had to be done." Gordon said. Kleiner smiled.

"That's the spirit!" He said with elation, patting Gordon on the shoulder.

"So when's this damn meeting?" Gordon asked, trying to change the subject.

"The budget meeting?" Kleiner asked, checking his watch, "Oh dear, we have ten minutes. Come on, we should hurry."

3. The Meeting

Sorry for the wait everyone who's reading, I've been really busy.

"All right Sir, the portal is ready!" Officer Ellis called, ushering Doctor Wallace Breen through the door. He entered a large room, with a vast ceiling and far walls. A series of pillars and rods lifted a platform in the very center of the room, encircling a large, green portal. Doctor Richard Keller stood near it, typing something into a control booth.

All three men wore Mark IV Hazard Suits, large, bulky helmets atop their heads. Breen heard Ellis mumble some complaint about them, and silently agreed.

"Into the elevator everyone!" Keller called from above, stepping up near the portal, "The portal goes in thirty seconds!"

Ellis and Breen rushed onto the elevator, rising up to the catwalks. They got out, and joined Keller at the railing. Breen could feel the heat emanating from the throbbing portal, could see tiny bolts of electricity zapping around it. He gulped.

"Officer Ellis, you go first," He said nervously.

"Nonsense," Keller replied, "The portal is completely safe. See?" And to emphasize his point, he stepped over the rail, and into the portal. With a buzz, he disappeared. The lights in the room dimmed for a moment, before returning to normal.

Ellis went next, closing his eyes before stepping in. As with Keller,

he disappeared, and the lights dimmed. Breen stepped over the rail.

"I'm sorry," He said, and then fell forward, plunging in. Everything went green for a moment, and he appeared on a rocky platform, hovering in the air. He looked around, and saw Ellis and Keller several platforms away.

Knowing full well the limitations of this world, he leapt into the air, landing solidly on the next platform. Off in the distance, he could see a massive floating island, cliffs towering above the rest.

He leapt his way to his colleagues, landing lightly next to Ellis. The man looked at him, a mix of awe and confusion visible through the helmet visor.

"Didn't you read the report? Lower gravity," Breen said. Ellis grinned.

They hurried over to the island, landing under a cluster of coarse vines. Keller brushed one away.

The three heard a distant howl, and Ellis' fingers instantly reached down to his revolver. They looked around nervously.

"Hello thereâ€|Doctor Breenâ€|" A voice said. They whirled around, to see the G-man striding up, alone.

"Who are you?" Keller demanded, stepping forward.

"I am one ofâ€|your clientsâ€|" The G-man purred.

"One?" Ellis asked. As if on cue, a green portal buzzed to life several feet away. A tall creature, covered in green armor stepped out. A small, third arm protruded from its chest.

Ellis drew his revolver, shakily pointing it at the creature as it walked forward, not seeming to care.

"Relax!" Breen yelled. Keller had moved behind the security guard. The creature stopped before them.

"This one is of the vortigaunts, representing the master, the Ninilah."

"Goodâ€|we are almostâ€|ready toâ€|begin, then," the G-man said, checking his watch. Ellis slowly lowered his pistol, taking several steps back.

They heard the familiar buzz, as a green portal materialized. Two figures, clad almost all in white armor, stepped through. Breen saw a single red ocular device on their faces, and futuristic rifles strapped to their backs. Nervously, he brushed off the thigh of his suit, clearing his throat.

"We represent the Benefactors," One of the figures said, his voice scrambled, probably through a filter on his radio.

"Then weâ€|can beginâ€|" The G-man said. Breen closed his eyes,

knowing full well what was to happen next.

Gordon leaned back against a counter, sipping a coffee. At the table before him, sat doctors Kleiner, Vance, Rosenberg, as well as several other senior members of the Science Team.

"What about the Blue Shift?" Eli asked, "Without Captain Patterson and Officer Russell, we have some openings."

"I nominate Otis Manning for captain," Rosenberg said, "He's been with us for the minimum four years, and has performed his duties far exceeding those of most others." Rosenberg was rather partial to the guard, having taken a liking to him early on.

"What about Calhoun?" Gordon asked, "He's been on the security team for four years as well, and isn't even in the Blue Shift yet. He has done far more than any other security officer on the team, and deserves a promotion."

"Calhoun is insane," One of the scientists said, "He should have been fired years ago. And he would've been, if not for you and Doctor Vance!"

"Barney is not insane," Eli said. Kleiner sighed, putting his head in his hands.

"He's a conspiracy theorist, convinced that the entire government is out to get him!"

"He is simply paranoid, as harmless as a fly." Gordon interjected, "I'm not saying you should give him captainship yet, just put him on the Blue Shift. He deserves it."

"You want to give the man a live firearm? Are you even listening to yourself?"

"Barney isn't going to shoot anyone," Gordon said, "He may feel uncomfortable with many of the people here, but he doesn't hate really any of you."

"How sure of that are you?" Doctor West asked.

"One hundred percent." Eli stated.

"Very well then. Because of the praise Doctors Freeman and Vance have given him, Barney Calhoun will be promoted to the Blue Shift. However, Otis Manning will become captain. Anything else?"

Breen stood opposite the G-man, Ellis and Keller behind him. The Vortigaunt was perched awkwardly off to the side, while the elites stood poised nearby.

"Why are we here?" Keller asked.

"Evolutionâ€¦" The G-man said, "The human race hasâ€¦lived past itsâ€¦primeâ€¦other things must takeâ€¦controlâ€¦"

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?" Ellis demanded, his hand once again on his revolver.

"Simple," An elite barked, "Humans will end soon, my people taking their place as dominant rulers of your planet. This meeting is to ensure that this happens with little bloodshed."

"No fucking way!" Ellis yelled, drawing his revolver and pointing it at the elites. They leveled their rifles.

"Enough!" Breen cried, "Ellis, holster your weapon! Now!" Ellis did, "Good. Now, the two of you need to understand that this is going to happen, no matter what we say or do here. And our might, however it may be, cannot withstand the power of the Combine, or the Ninilah. If we do not cooperate, we are all going to die."

"Goodâ€|very goodâ€|it seems thatâ€|Doctor Breenâ€|understandsâ€|completelyâ€|"

"So we're going to beâ€|invadedâ€|?" Keller asked.

"Yes," The Vortigaunt muttered, "But we can do this with heavy casualties, or we can not. It is your choice."

"How would we cooperate?" Breen asked, "Just let you invade? You should know that I'm in no position to--"

"This is understoodâ€|of courseâ€|" The G-man said.

"We enter your world at your facility, the Black Mesa," growled the Vortigaunt, "Where you will devise an excuse to create what you would call a 'resonance cascade'."

"If you cooperate fully," The elite said, "The only casualties will be those at Black Mesa. I am afraid that no one there can survive the incident, with the exception of you three."

"And then what?" Ellis asked, gritting his teeth, "We just resume our normal lives while you conquer our fucking world?"

"Of course notâ€|you three will goâ€|into hidingâ€|for a whileâ€|while the invasionâ€|commencesâ€|when all hope ofâ€|victory appears toâ€|beâ€|lostâ€|step upâ€|negotiateâ€|become representatives ofâ€|Earthâ€|insideâ€|the Combineâ€|"

"Where does thisâ€|Combineâ€|come in anyway?" Keller asked.

"After Black Mesa is destroyed, and the portal storm occurs," The elite replied, "Your people will fall victim to the Ninilah, and his creatures. After a brief period of war, my people will arrive, and feign a quick defeat of them. The humans will stand no chance against the alliance we have formed."

"I thought you said the only casualties would be at Black Mesa," Ellis said, trying to contain himself.

"This isâ€|warâ€|" The G-man said, "Collateral damage isâ€|unavoidableâ€|"

"Bullshit!" Ellis yelled.

"Ellis. Shut up!" Breen said, "Are there any chances that this invasion will fail, even if we live up to our part

completely?"

"Chances of failure are slim." The G-man replied, "But failure is possible only at the hands of someone at Black Mesa."

"I see."

"So will you cooperate?" The G-man asked.

"I will!" Hundreds of thousands of miles away, a promising young private, by the name of Adrian Shepard, cried out. Odessa Cubbage, now a sergeant, stood in front of him.

"Good! Now move soldier!" Shepard ran off, headed for the obstacle course. After his encounter with the "spook" Odessa had began drinking. After coming to work drunk, he had been busted down severely, and placed at a boot camp in Nevada, alongside a Drill Sergeant Barnes.

Odessa turned, and began to walk across the grass, headed for his office. Walking through the corridors of the building, he felt a vibrating in his pocket. Taking out his cell phone, he answered it.

"Yeah?" He said.

"Cubbage? It's Barnes. Get to my office now, it's important."

Before Odessa could respond, the line went dead. He pocketed the phone again, and wheeled around, in the direction of Barnes' office. Going inside, he cursed loudly.

"What the hell are you doing here?" He cried, his hand going to his gun.

"Cubbage! Calm down!" Barnes barked, getting to his feet.

"What is he doing here!" Cubbage demanded.

For standing there, in the office, was the G-man.

End
file.